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NewsRoom

6/7/09 SAEN 17A

Page 1

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June 7, 2009

Section: A Section

How Texas speaker handled voter ID issue

Gary Scharrer

AUSTIN - New House Speaker **Joe Straus** knew Senate Republicans complicated his job when they changed long-standing Senate rules on the second day of the session to guarantee the passage of a **voter ID** bill on their side of the Capitol.

The political dynamics were much different at the west end of the state Capitol, where Straus, R-San Antonio, had to navigate a House divided between 75 Republicans and 74 Democrats, not counting himself. If Senate Republicans were going to make voter ID their line-in-the-sand issue, House Democrats were obligated to kick back.

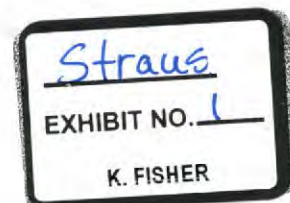
And Straus had promised to be a bipartisan speaker on his way to winning the job in early January with more than 70 Democrats supporting him. It takes 76 votes to win a contest for House speaker.

"The issue of ballot security is important, but the way the Senate behaved at the first opportunity did nothing to help the House pass a responsible anti-voter fraud bill. So, at this point, it's become all politics," Straus said in February.

For Republicans, the issue was simple: Make sure that people who come to vote are who they say they are. The hardliners wanted a law requiring a photo - without exceptions. And the public favors the concept of voter ID.

For Democrats, the issue was more nuanced. Many were willing to support some sort of voter ID system as long as voting was made easier - not harder.

The absence of a consensus created a stalemate.



In the end, Democrats used House rules to tie that chamber up in knots over five days to prevent the voter ID bill from reaching the floor for debate. But the stalling action produced collateral damage as other important legislation died in the process, including expansion of the Children's Health Insurance Program.

Take away voter ID from the legislative equation and Straus might have had smooth sailing.

"Everything would have been wonderful, but it wasn't my choice to deal with it the way we had to with the temperature turned up as much as it was. That was Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst's decision," Straus said one day after the session ended. "While I'm supportive of voter ID and ballot security, I thought it was unwise for him to take the extraordinarily measure that he did to get to this place."

Early on, Straus remained optimistic that he could move a reasonable voter ID measure because of his faith in Rep. Todd Smith, R-Eules, whom he chose to chair the House Elections Committee.

Democratic leaders, however, remained skeptical. They trusted Smith, who is considered a fair and reasonable lawmaker. But the committee had too many GOP hardliners for the Democrats' comfort. They didn't trust Smith's ability to control the committee.

In early March, the speaker believed he needed for the bill to be considered, if not approved.

"I need the debate to take place, and I need for it not to die because of me," he said. Meanwhile, some of Straus' Democratic allies, who helped him become speaker, privately were framing the issue as one that could make or break the new speaker.

"It's strange how an issue like this can just suck all the political oxygen out of the session - not that the issue is not worth discussing and finding some way to improve," Straus said in early March. "But it shouldn't dominate the legislative session when we have a very challenging economy, a long-term budget problem in Texas that's going to be completely ignored for two more years."

By the end of April, 71 House Republicans signed a letter demanding a hard-line approach on voter ID.

"Both sides are taking a really hard position and exaggerating it. Democrats exaggerate the danger of a more modest bill, and Republicans exaggerate the depth of the problem that needs to be addressed," he said. "But if people get through their theatrics on this, I don't think it will be a lasting problem."

A day before Democrats launched a five-day stall, Straus sensed an imminent showdown: "It's the one big dramatic moment, but we'll get through it."

Straus said he would try to keep the House from blowing up over the issue, but without playing a heavy hand.

The Democrats' five-day stall, in which they debated every routine bill to kill time, clearly frustrated Straus.

"I wasn't upset about the Democrats' use of the rules, although it's unprecedented and dangerous to use the local and consent calendar that way. My response was very firm - I would not recognize any member to suspend a rule to take up a bill that was behind the local and consent calendar and the voting ID bill."

That meant a number of important bills Democrats wanted to debate would die by as a result of their stalling tactics voter ID.

Ironically, the voter ID bill probably increased Straus' stature with fellow Republicans.

"They saw me stand up and take a side but not try to defend the breaking of the rules. I enforced the rules. I was on their side, and it worked out fine," he said.

"Both sides took a position and stood with it and now we're passed it. The (voter ID) legislation didn't get voted on, but two weeks from now they're going to say, 'Well, whatever.'"

---- INDEX REFERENCES ----

NEWS SUBJECT: (Government (1GO80); Public Affairs (1PU31))

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OTHER INDEXING: (DEMOCRATS; GOP; HEALTH INSURANCE PROGRAM; HOUSE; HOUSE DEMOCRATS; HOUSE ELECTIONS COMMITTEE; HOUSE REPUBLICANS; HOUSE SPEAKER JOE STRAUS; SENATE; STRAUS; TEXAS) (David Dewhurst; Democratic; Ironically; Republicans; Senate Republicans; Smith; Todd Smith)

EDITION: STATE&METRO

Word Count: 1007

6/7/09 SAEN 17A

END OF DOCUMENT

XXXXXXX
XXXX
XXX, Texas 7XXXX

Dear XXXXXXX:

Thank you for contacting me with your concerns regarding Senate Bill 14 and voting by mail.

Senate Bill 14 passed the Senate on January 26, 2011. The Select House Committee on Voter Identification and Voter Fraud heard testimony on Senate Bill 14 March 1, 2011. You are correct that Senate Bill 14 will not specifically address potential fraud with regard to mail-in-ballots.

The 82nd Legislature convened on January 11, 2011. To date there has been no legislation filed to address potential fraud related to mail-in-ballots. The deadline to file legislation for this session is March 11, 2011.

I encourage you to contact your state representative, the Honorable XXXXX so that they will be aware of your views on this issue. His contact information is as follows:

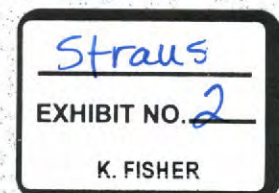
The Honorable XXXXX
XXXXXX
XXXX, Texas 7XXXX
(XXX) XXX-XXXX

Thank you again for sharing your thoughts with me. I will keep them in mind throughout the next legislative session. Please don't hesitate to contact my office if I may be of assistance.

Sincerely,

Joc Straus
Speaker

JRS/mdf



Dear Mrs

Page 1 of 1

Dear Mrs. Peters:

Thank you for your correspondence regarding legislation relating to voter fraud, voter identification and citizenship requirements. I appreciate having the benefit of your views.

As you are aware, state and federal law both require all voters to be citizens, but current state law requires no photo identification or proof of citizenship when registering to vote or when voting. I agree that we need to revise our current Texas voting laws to ensure that only U.S. citizens who are Texas residents are voting in our Texas elections.

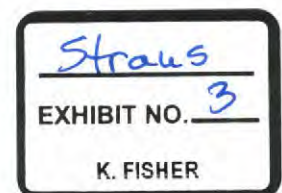
During both the 79th and 80th Legislative sessions, several bills were filed addressing voter identification requirements, including HB 218 and HB 626 in 2007. HB 218 requires voters to provide photo identification when voting. While this bill passed the House on April 24, 2007, it was never debated by the full Senate. The amended version of HB 626 would require confirmation of a voter's citizenship by the Secretary of State's Office when registering a voter or changing a voter's registration. This bill passed the House on May 2, 2007, but was never scheduled for consideration by the Senate.

As you know, similar legislation has been filed for the consideration of the 81st legislative session. Once the legislation is introduced for discussion, I will be certain to keep your comments and concerns in mind. Please rest assured that I will continue to work to ensure the legitimacy of our elections.

Again, thank you for contacting my office. If I can be of further assistance to you on this or any other issue, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

JOE STRAUS
Speaker



Dear Ms. Lewis:

Thank you for your correspondence regarding your concerns over legislation relating to voter fraud, voter identification and citizenship requirements. I appreciate having the benefit of your views.

As you are aware, state and federal law both require all voters to be citizens, but current state law requires no photo identification or proof of citizenship when registering to vote or when voting.

During both the 79th and 80th Legislative sessions, several bills were filed addressing voter identification requirements, including HB 218 and HB 626 in 2007. HB 218 requires voters to provide photo identification when voting. While this bill passed the House on April 24, 2007, it was never debated by the full Senate. The amended version of HB 626 would require confirmation of a voter's citizenship by the Secretary of State's Office when registering a voter or changing a voter's registration. This bill passed the House on May 2, 2007, but was never scheduled for consideration by the Senate.

As you know, similar legislation has been filed for the consideration of the 81st legislative session. Once the legislation is introduced for discussion, I will be certain to keep your comments and concerns in mind as I work continue to work with my colleagues towards serving the interests of citizens of our great state.

Again, thank you for contacting my office. If I can be of further assistance to you on this or any other issue, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

JOE STRAUS
Speaker

Dear Mr. Powers:

Thank you for your e-mail regarding legislation relating to voter fraud and voter identification. I appreciate having the benefit of your views.

As you are aware, state and federal law both require all voters to be citizens, but current state law requires no photo identification or proof of citizenship when registering to vote or when voting. I agree that we need to revise our current Texas voting laws to ensure that only U.S. citizens who are Texas residents are voting in our Texas elections.

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As the current legislative session progresses, it is likely that this legislation will be introduced on this issue, and I will be certain to keep your comments and concerns in mind. Please rest assured that I will continue to work to ensure the legitimacy of our elections.

Again, thank you for contacting my office. If I can be of further assistance to you on this or any other issue, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

JOE STRAUS
Speaker

Dear Mrs. Cooper:

Thank you for your correspondence regarding legislation relating to voter fraud, voter identification and citizenship requirements. I appreciate having the benefit of your views.

As you are aware, state and federal law both require all voters to be citizens, but current state law requires no photo identification or proof of citizenship when registering to vote or when voting. I agree that we need to revise our current Texas voting laws to ensure that only U.S. citizens who are Texas residents are voting in our Texas elections.

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Again, thank you for contacting my office. If I can be of further assistance to you on this or any other issue, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

JOE STRAUS
Speaker



Outgoing Correspondence Report

Type: Letter	Date Sent:	Staff Assigned: J. Stribling
Description: Response	Date Sent To Speaker:	Mail Merge Description:
Hyperlink: X:\Mail Room\Constituent Mail\Issue Letters\ voter i.d\Kalter.3-9-09.doc	File Location:	No. of Recipients: 1
Status: Sent	Last Action Date: 3/26/2009 09:11 PM	

Summary: Thank you for your correspondence regarding legislation relating to voter fraud, voter identification and citizenship requirements. I appreciate having the benefit of your views.

As you are aware, state and federal law both require all voters to be citizens, but current state law requires no photo identification or proof of citizenship when registering to vote or when voting. I agree that we need to revise our current Texas voting laws to ensure that only U.S. citizens who are Texas residents are voting in our Texas elections.

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As you know, similar legislation has been filed for the consideration of the 81st legislative session. Both HB 127 and HB 373, dealing with voter identification, have been referred to the House Committee on Elections. The committee chairman of the House Committee on Elections has discretion over whether or not to grant this bill a public hearing, which will be the next step in the legislative process for this measure. Following the committee review, the bills will be presented to the full House for consideration.

I will keep your comments in mind when this issue is presented to the Texas House of Representatives. Please rest assured that I will continue to work to ensure the legitimacy of our elections. Again, thank you for contacting my office. If I can be of further assistance to you on this or any other issue, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Recipients: Kalter, Mrs. Cheryl
13807 Jess Gardens
San Antonio, Texas 78232-4976

Incoming Summary: constituent: oppose voter id bill



Outgoing Correspondence Report

Type: Letter	Date Sent:	Staff Assigned: J. Stribling
Description: Response	Date Sent To Speaker:	Mail Merge Description:
Hyperlink: X:\Mail Room\Constituent Mail\Issue Letters\ voter i.d\Forrest.3-13-09.doc	File Location:	No. of Recipients: 1
Status: Sent	Last Action Date: 5/4/2009 12:37 PM	

Summary: Thank you for your correspondence regarding legislation relating to voter fraud, voter identification and citizenship requirements. I appreciate having the benefit of your views.

As you are aware, state and federal law both require all voters to be citizens, but current state law requires no photo identification or proof of citizenship when registering to vote or when voting.

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As you know, similar legislation has been filed for the consideration of the 81st legislative session. HB 125 and HB 373 have both been referred to the House Committee on Elections. The committee chairman has discretion over whether or not to grant these bills a public hearing.

Once the legislation is introduced for discussion of the full House, I will be certain to keep your comments and concerns in mind. Please rest assured that I will continue to work to ensure the legitimacy of our elections.

Again, thank you for contacting my office. If I can be of further assistance to you on this or any other issue, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Recipients: Forrest, Mr. Hank
15307 Mount Eagle St
San Antonio, Texas 78232-4027

Incoming Summary: constituent support the voter id bill



Outgoing Correspondence Report

Type: Letter	Date Sent:	Staff Assigned: J. Stribling
Description: Response	Date Sent To Speaker:	Mail Merge Description:
Hyperlink: X:\Mail Room\Constituent Mail\Issue Letters\ voter i.d\Felan.3-13-09.doc	File Location:	No. of Recipients: 1
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Once the legislation is introduced for discussion of the full House, I will be certain to keep your comments and concerns in mind. Please rest assured that I will continue to work to ensure the legitimacy of our elections.

Again, thank you for contacting my office. If I can be of further assistance to you on this or any other issue, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Recipients: Felan, Ms. Blanche
PO Box 200991
San Antonio, Texas 78220

Incoming Summary: support voter id legislation



Outgoing Correspondence Report

Type: Letter	Date Sent:	Staff Assigned: J. Stribling
Description: Response	Date Sent To Speaker:	Mail Merge Description:
Hyperlink: X:\Mail Room\Constituent Mail\Issue Letters\ voter i d\Castaneda.3-9-09.doc	File Location:	No. of Recipients: 1
Status: Sent	Last Action Date: 3/26/2009 09:11 PM	

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As you know, similar legislation has been filed for the consideration of the 81st legislative session. Both HB 127 and HB 373, relating to voter identification, have been referred to the House Committee on Elections. The committee chairman of the House Committee on Elections has discretion over whether or not to grant this bill a public hearing, which will be the next step in the legislative process for this measure. Following the committee review, the bills will be presented to the full House for consideration.

I will keep your comments in mind when this issue is presented to the Texas House of Representatives. Please rest assured that I will continue to work to ensure the legitimacy of our elections. Again, thank you for contacting my office. If I can be of further assistance to you on this or any other issue, please do not hesitate to contact me.

On Voter Rights

Recipients: Castaneda, Mr. Carlos 1107 Old Lake San Antonio, Texas 78245	Incoming Summary: oppose voter id bill
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Dear Ms. Lewis:

Thank you for your correspondence regarding your concerns over legislation relating to voter fraud, voter identification and citizenship requirements. I appreciate having the benefit of your views.

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Again, thank you for contacting my office. If I can be of further assistance to you on this or any other issue, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

JOE STRAUS
Speaker



Incoming Correspondence Report

Date Received	Name	Address Type	Address
3/23/2009 AM	Kennedy, Mrs. Pat	Home	3705 W. Louisiana Midland, Texas 79703-5521
Type: E-mail	Date Written:	Staff Assigned: H. Loomis	
Description:	Status: Closed	Response Required: No	
Priority:	File Location:	No. of Responses:	
Origin Office:	Date Closed: 3/23/2009 10:08:00AM	Closed By: H. Loomis	
Summary: House Speaker Straus:			

A lot of Texans are so angry at not only the politicians in Washington.....but the politicians in Austin!!!

Where is the support for immigration legislation THIS SESSION in Austin??? The news Texans are getting is that immigration legislation will not go forward this session. Immigration bills have been filed.....so pass them!!!

WHAT IN THE HECK IS GOING ON?????

Texas legislators MUST step up and take control.....or go find another job!! This is ridiculous that our own state legislators don't have the backbone to step up and enforce EXISTING LAWS that could close down the sanctuary cities in Texas; pass Voter ID in Texas; mandate the E-Verify program in Texas; declare English the official language of Texas; train and put local law enforcement out on the streets in Texas to apprehend and deport illegal foreigners and criminals and stop all Texas welfare benefits to noncitizens!!!!

WHAT IN THE HECK IS GOING ON IN AUSTIN?????

STOP WAITING ON WASHINGTON TO "TAKE CARE OF BUSINESS".....BECAUSE WASHINGTON HAS NO INTENTIONS OF "TAKING CARE OF BUSINESS".....because they are too busy pouring our tax dollars down a black hole!!!!

Washington is so messed up that those Demwits don't know which way is up.....and they certainly have no idea or don't care that our country has been invaded by illegal foreigners who are draining our economy and killing our citizens with drugs and violence!! There is a war going on in the United States.....but evidently someone forgot to tell Washington!!!

Washington and Austin leaders are catering and pandering to the open borders activists (LaRaza, MELDEF, LULAC, Chambers of Commerce, Catholic churches and businesses who want cheap labor!)... who are intent on turning our country into a third-world country!! If you don't believe it's happening.....look around!! American citizens are fast turning into a minority population!!!

HELLO-O-O AUSTIN!!!!!! IS ANYONE IN CHARGE?.....or is everyone still too busy feuding amongst yourselves to do the job you were elected to do by the citizens of Texas???

TEXANS WANT IMMIGRATION LEGISLATION ACTION....AND THEY WANT IT NOW!!!! IF AUSTIN LEGISLATORS DONT STEP UP AND TAKE CONTROL.....WHO WILL??? CERTAINLY NOT WASHINGTON!!!!!!

Dear Mrs. Peters:

Thank you for your correspondence regarding legislation relating to voter fraud, voter identification and citizenship requirements. I appreciate having the benefit of your views.

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Again, thank you for contacting my office. If I can be of further assistance to you on this or any other issue, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

JOE STRAUS
Speaker

Dear Mrs.

Page 1 of 1

Dear Mrs. McCann:

Thank you for contacting me with your concerns regarding voter identification.

Several bills addressing the issue of voter identification have been filed for the consideration of the 81st Legislature, including HB 125, HB 373, and SB 362. Due to procedural deadlines near the end of the legislative session, it is not possible for HB 125 and HB 373 to pass the House of Representatives. On May 11, 2009 SB 362 passed the House Committee on Elections by a narrow margin (5-4) and has now been placed on the Major State Calendar.

I believe that the state Texas should establish an election process that ensures the security and legitimacy of our elections without disenfranchising voters. As relevant voter identification bills and SB 362 are presented to the House of Representatives I will be sure to keep your concerns in mind.

Again, thank you for your correspondence. I value your input. If I can be of further assistance to you on this or any other issue, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

JOE STRAUS
Speaker